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RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA PRIORITY 9156

RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 5333

RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL PRIORITY 5014

RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI PRIORITY 5780

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BANGKOK 003255

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP, DRL, IO; NSC FOR PHU

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TAGS: PHUM PGOV KPAQ TH

SUBJECT: THAILAND'S UDD LEADERS DISMISS CONCERNS ABOUT NOVEMBER 1 RALLY; GRENADE ATTACKS ON PAD, JUDGES

REF: A. BANGKOK 3226 (THAKSIN ASSOCIATE)

1B. BANGKOK 3192 (PRIVY COUNCILORS)

1C. BANGKOK 3154 (PEACEFUL PROTEST)

1D. BANGKOK 2856 (PAD DEFIANCE CONTINUES)

1E. BANGKOK 6654 (ANTI-COUP SUICIDE)

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Classified By: Pol Counselor George Kent, reason 1.4 (b, d)

SUMMARY AND COMMENT

11. (C) Leaders of the pro-government United Front of Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD) assured us that a major UDD rally on November 1, at which former PM Thaksin is expected to speak via phone, would be non-violent. A leading UDD figure stressed UDD's role as the primary obstacle to future coups. Another UDD leader expressed concern about possible arrests of UDD leaders following the rally. Opinions of other observers about the potential for violence are mixed; some are concerned that the large crowd could move beyond the control of UDD leaders, while others see the real danger not from planned events like the UDD rally but in unplanned clashes or incidents, such as the grenade attack which injured ten security guards from the anti-government People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) in the early hours of October 30. A second small bomb exploded at a royalist judge's house several hours earlier. The police have yet to identify suspects in these incidents which, like many similar politically-motivated attacks in years past, are likely to go unsolved.

12. (C) Comment: The likelihood of violence at the November 1 rally appears slim, at least according to UDD leaders. However, we do not rule out the possibility of violence if UDD supporters were to encounter PAD protesters. The size of the expected crowd at the November 1 rally at a suburban sports stadium (organizers predict up to 100,000) offers the potential for moving beyond the control of UDD leaders, although street violence, insofar as it might prompt military intervention against the government, does not appear to be in the UDD's interest. Ambassador and other Embassy officials continue to emphasize to contacts on all sides the importance of demonstrations remaining peaceful. End Summary and Comment.

UDD ORGANIZERS' PERSPECTIVE ON RALLY SECURITY

¶ 13. (C) A variety of UDD leaders and PPP-affiliated politicians have told us in recent days that the high-profile rally planned for November 1, at which ex-PM Thaksin is expected to phone in, would be peaceful. While widely seen as a UDD demonstration, the event is nominally organized as a live version of the pro-government "Truth Today" television program, though it will not be carried live on NBT. UDD leader Charan Ditthaphichai told us October 29 that he expected a crowd of as many as 100,000 UDD supporters at the rally. Julapun Amornwiwat, a legislator from the People's Power Party (and son of the Foreign Minister), emphasized to us separately October 29 that the fundamental purpose of the rally was to send a signal of mass support for the government, in order to offset the extensive press coverage of PAD demonstrations.

¶ 14. (C) We spoke on October 30 with Jakrapob Penkair, one of the UDD's founders and leading organizers, to emphasize USG interest in all political processes remaining non-violent. Jakrapob assured us that the UDD's rally would be peaceful. He said the UDD had moved the demonstration site to the suburban stadium near Ramkhamhaeng University in order to be distant from downtown sites used by the anti-government PAD. UDD had ensured adequate space inside the stadium so that its supporters would not mill about outside the venue, and had arranged for security to be provided by approximately 800 police and 400 student "guards," who would help to maintain order.

¶ 15. (C) Jakrapob claimed the UDD constituted a primary obstacle to the military carrying out a coup. He said one of

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the principal themes of the November 1 rally would be an exhortation to the public to actively impede any coup attempt. For example, speakers would explain to the crowd that they should surround tanks on the street to block them from moving forward. Separately, Poowanida Kunpalin, a former legislator who co-founded the Thai Rak Thai party with Thaksin, similarly told us on October 21 that the UDD aimed to engage in large-scale activities primarily in order to deter the military from launching a coup, by showing that Thaksin loyalists were able to mobilize in large numbers in Bangkok.

¶ 16. (C) We asked Jakrapob whether the UDD was coordinating its activities with those of former top police official Salang Bunnag or Major General Khattiya "Sae Daeng" Sawasdipol (see ref C on their public statements). Jakrapob said the UDD did not know these men's day-to-day activities, but there was loose coordination among them. The separate (pro-Thaksin) networks would need to work together in the event of an actual or seemingly-imminent coup.

¶ 17. (C) UDD leader Charan brushed aside any discussion of violence or possible coup d'état as a result of the rally. He claimed there would be no mass movement of the crowd, because it would create disorder and the conditions for military intervention. On the other hand, UDD was stoking supporters' emotions, focusing attention on the second anniversary of the suicide of a taxi driver who hanged himself (ref E) in protest of the 2006 military coup. Charan lauded the driver's dedication to us, flashing a thumbs-up sign as he related the man was "prepared for death" in support of his ideals.

¶ 18. (C) Charan expressed fear of mass arrests of UDD figures, including himself, following the November 1 rally. He worried that the Army would claim UDD leaders were insulting the monarchy and violating lese majeste provisions of Thai law. He alleged PAD was planning to send some of its members, posing as UDD supporters, to infiltrate the UDD gathering and distribute anti-monarchy propaganda to provide

the Army with a pretext to intervene. Charan asked if he could seek refuge at the U.S. Embassy - an option which we discouraged. He interpreted the recent public threat by the Army to crack down on lese majeste offenses as a prelude to a coup d'etat, as Army leaders typically justify coups by claiming they were defending the monarchy. However, Charan did not expect a coup to take place imminently; he predicted one would not occur before the ASEAN summit, which Thailand will host December 15-18.

GRENADE ATTACK ON PAD ENCAMPMENT INJURES 10

¶9. (C) While some observers fear spin-off effects of the November 1 rally, most observers and political actors we have talked to in recent days suggest the real danger of clashes or bloodshed that might provoke military intervention would come from unplanned incidents, rather than scheduled rallies like the UDD event. One such incident occurred at approximately 3:20 a.m. October 30, when a hand grenade attack on PAD guards stationed near Government House resulted in 10 injuries, two serious. A policeman specializing in post-blast investigations told us the grenade was an M-67. Manager Media, owned by PAD leader Sondhi Limthongkul, also reported a separate attack in which four to five men allegedly emerged from Metropolitan Police Headquarters and fired shots at PAD guards near the Government House at 4:25 a.m. Other media accounts of the middle-of-the-night incidents did not mention any connection to the police.

¶10. (U) The media also reported that an unidentified, dead male was discovered behind the Metropolitan Police Headquarters, around 150 meters from the PAD staging area, early on the morning of October 30 after the police secured the area following the grenade attack. PAD guards did not recognize the body. A press report identified the man as a Bangkok resident shot once above his left eye and said that his body was "battered by hard objects." A police officer said he saw the man, who appeared drunk, walking past a

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police checkpoint, shouting, "fight them."

BOMBS EXPLODE AT JUDGES' HOMES

¶11. (SBU) A small bomb exploded at the residence of Constitutional Court Justice Jarun Pakditanakul at 1:00 a.m. on October 30, according to the police, but did not result in any injuries. A similar bomb attack occurred at the home of Administrative Court President Akaratorn Chularat on the morning of October 21; no injuries were reported. Both judges are viewed by the Thaksin-camp as royalists connected to one of the Privy Councilors trying to engineer the downfall of the Somchai administration (refs A-B). There have been no claims of responsibility or leads on whom might be behind the attacks.

JOHN